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An assessment of the Liberian National Police's responsiveness and mechanisms regarding sexual and gender-based violence during the United Nations Mission in Liberia: 2003 - 2017

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Abstract

The prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence against women has continued to plague Liberia since the end of the 14-year civil war. The reconstruction of Liberia's national security sector is of paramount importance to ensuring justice for victims of sexual and gender-based violence. This research paper assessed the evolution of the Liberian National Police's (LNP) responsiveness and mechanisms towards sexual and gender-based violence over the duration of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). This research was conducted by making using of process tracing and content analysis as well as a combination of inductive and deductive research design. This was beneficial to reach the paper's results as it looked at the outcome and intervening variables in the data analysis as well as deducing the final argument as it related to the hypothesis in the research design and methodological application of the paper. These findings and methodology were set out on the foundation of utilising the Theory of Gender and War, which provided the lens of analysis.

Qualitative and quantitative research gathered found that the presence of UNMIL made the LNP more accountable and reliable to the public but over the years, the SGBV mechanisms in place and responses to SGBV cases had not sufficiently improved and the trajectory without UNMIL's presence does not see SGBV being reduced in the country. The overall assessment of the research problem of sexual and gender-based violence found that the national police's primary impediments (outside of financial and accessibility barriers) are connected to the general societal response to violence against women in Liberia. It is imperative to address entrenched societal behaviour that stigmatises victims of gender-based violence in order for the LNP to show more sustainable improvement. The recommendations that have been suggested look at not only improving the identified deficits of the LNP by expanding their presence, but also to work on the link between codified law and traditional justice to gain a better scope of those accessing redress for SGBV incidences. In addition, the recommendations also engage with the youth at a community level, to begin the process of eradicating the harmful way that patriarchal hegemony and discrimination against women and girls determines the gender dynamics in the country which includes SGBV and the openness with which the LNP can be approached regarding SGBV crimes.